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ABSTRACT

In response to criticisms directed at the public schools, numerous reforms have been designed to bring about change. Most of today's reform movements assume that the schools have the capacity and obligation to provide all of a young person's education. They also assume that all education takes place in the schools. Neither of these assumptions is defensible since education is much broader than the schools and learning takes place anywhere. The central place of the family, church, neighborhood, and community in a child's education is crucial. The way the school is governed and controlled must change in order to allow these other sources to contribute to the educational process. Educational change must focus upon the individual school, not the school system. This is the fundamental unit that will bring about the changes that are needed to enlist the cooperation of parents and communities. (Author/AM)

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Citizens, Schooling, and Education

by Harold Howe II

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THE public schools need thoughtful friends today more than at any time in my experience. They are beset by problems they cannot solve and by insistent questions they cannot answer to the satisfaction of those who raise the questions. They are charged with costing more and teaching less, with inability to prepare young people for modern life, with bureaucratic inefficiency, with ignoring basic learning skills, and with making children the pawns in a power struggle for control of educational funds and policies.

In response to such criticisms various well meaning persons have devised numerous reforms, each designed to bring change in the schools. Today's educational scene is crowded with the advocates of accountability, career education, effective learning, individualized instruction, performance-based evaluation of teachers, back-to-basics, open classrooms, experiential education, and numerous other medicines for the ills of the schools. As far as I know, no single school is trying to embrace all these causes at the same time, and that's just as well, because the result would probably be either frustration or a revolt by teachers and children.

Actually I have no quarrel with most of these efforts to make schools serve children better—except perhaps with the back-to-basics people. I wish they would turn around and go forward to basics. Their idea of retreating to the good old days makes me nervous because it suggests that they might want to ignore what we have learned about how children differ in their modes and rates of learning. It's a good idea to pay more attention to fundamental learning skills, but I hope we won't enlist in that cause an ancient pedagogy that limits the opportunities of both the most advanced and the least able students.

Harold Howe II, vice president of the Ford Foundation, is in charge of its Division of Education and Research. The following remarks were adapted from an address before the Citizens Committee on Public Education, Philadelphia, April 20, 1977.

A note on Foundation-assisted programs in related activities begins on page 13.

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But most of today's reform movements appear to assume that the schools have the capacity and the obligation to provide *all* of a young person's education as well as the corollary that all or most education takes place in the schools. Neither of these propositions now seems to me defensible, and let me explore just one implication of the notion that education is much broader than the schools—the implication for the governance of education.

In March 1976, Lawrence Cremin, the president of Teachers College, Columbia, delivered some lectures at the University of Wisconsin. These have now been published, and they are worth your attention.* With a historian's perspective he argues that the education of children in America has always been a more widely based enterprise than schooling. The central place of the family in a child's education is obvious. The role of the church, of neighborhood and community, of such agencies as scouts and the 4-H Club, and in modern times of television are almost as clear cut. What children learn from other children is less well understood but is clearly important. Even today most children learn about their sexuality not from their families or their schools but from each other.

Learning Everywhere

Thinking of education in these broad terms suggests that schools must adjust to and take advantage of what is happening in all the other institutions serving young people. Simplistic thinking on this front suggests a division of labor in which schools have the burden of intellectual development while family, community, and other agencies are assigned the tasks of social, moral, and emotional growth. The trouble with this assumption is that it doesn't jibe with reality. Children's learning can't be neatly compartmentalized. Many children learn to read at home. All of them are influenced in their attitudes and values by what happens at school. The hours they spend before television somehow affect their knowledge, skills, and behavior, although we don't know very much about what those effects are.

It was once fashionable to think of the mind as analogous to a muscle. If it was exercised by repetitive use, it would grow. This view became the argument for the bitter-pill theory of education, based on the old-fashioned, medical notion that the worse a medicine tasted the more likely it was to cure your ailments. Listerine advertisements still hark back to this sort of foolishness, which in the field of education has provided the rationale for overemphasis on rote learning and for such exercises as the required study of Latin. Whatever was dull and difficult was thought to develop the mind, and little attention was given to the by-products of such learning, among them a distaste for intellectual tasks generally and for schooling in particular.

Now we know that the child who comes to school brings with him all that he has met in his other experiences. We must, then, ask ourselves whether the school should do anything differently because the child's experiences outside have changed and will continue to do so.

Among the recent changes in the lives of children and youth in America perhaps the greatest is the impact of new technologies as exemplified by television, by the increased mobility of families, and by an attendant standardization in both the play and the consumption habits of young people. It is well known that children spend more time watching television than they do in school, but there is little effective effort to develop their discrimination and taste or to use television for school purposes. Children all want the same Barbie Doll; they all experience Big Bird; and they all aspire to Coca-Cola as a symbol of joy in youth and to tobacco and alcohol as symbols of adulthood. Kids in the slums and kids in suburbia like the same blue jeans, which have paradoxically assumed an important symbolism for youth in the Soviet Union and among young communists in India.

But there are other important influences on young people beside those flowing directly from a technology that tends to standardize and to reduce regional and traditional differences in taste

*Traditions in American Education, Lawrence A. Cremin, Basic Books, Inc., New York, 1977.

and experience. For example, almost 50 percent of children in school now have working mothers, and that proportion will grow steadily. Yet many schools assume that mother is at home doing what she used to do. The size of the American family has declined so that the child entering first grade today is likely to have fewer brothers and sisters than he or she did a few years ago, a trend that surely has some subtle impact on children.

We don't know much about the connection between these and other changes in the lives of children and the social pathology that we see around us. We do know, however, some disturbing facts about today's young Americans. For example, a larger proportion of them are involved with the police and the courts than was the case a few years ago. While drug use is declining a little, alcoholism among teenagers is rapidly growing. There is a substantial growth in pregnancies among unwed adolescents as compared to the early 1960s, and suicides among youth are increasing. Such indicators may be early warnings of more troubles to come or they may be temporary flare-ups that will quiet down. My guess is that we ignore them at our peril, and I would assert also that schools alone are inadequate to the task of addressing themselves to such problems. I hasten to add that families alone and the justice system alone are likely to be equally ineffective.

So what is to be done? Common sense suggests a coming together of the interests of the institutions responsible for and concerned about the children and youth in a community to see what it can devise in the way of new thinking and new practice for the benefit of young people. The school is the best gathering place for the family, the justice system, the youth-serving organizations, employers of young people, and those offering them opportunities to do useful volunteer work. By reshaping the nature of the school and by rethinking its alliances to other elements in the community or neighborhood, there is just a chance that the many sided education of children can be allied with their schooling to address the changed circumstances of childhood and youth.

Who Runs the Schools?

If anything like this is to have any chance of success, it has to happen at the level of the individual school. The way the school is governed and controlled must change in order to admit to its inner decision-making processes various partners who are not now engaged in these—persons from other public and private agencies, from informal neighborhood groups, and from outside the political, administrative, and bureaucratic systems that now monopolize the governance of the schools. Throughout the United States we have official bodies called boards of education, but they deal only with schooling, not education as I am defining it here.

A quick look at who runs the schools today suggests there are three major agencies at work—the elected or appointed representatives of the people in local and state boards, the managers or administrators appointed by these boards and responsible to them but entrenched enough in their pseudo-professionalism and power to have a separate life of their own, and the teaching profession, which is increasingly organized to enable it to deal with the other two. All three of these parties profess a major concern for what happens to children in the schools, and although all three of them have other interests as well, a considerable proportion of their energy is indeed focussed upon serving young people better. But they exist and conduct their rivalries for power within a triangular preserve about which they make a common assumption—that no one else should be allowed within that preserve. As long as they are successful in maintaining that posture, there is little hope of accomplishing what I am recommending: the recognition of new voices in decision making about the nature of education broadly defined at the local school level.

There have, of course, been efforts in recent years to bring new forms of participation in the affairs of schools. Decentralization of school governance in such places as Detroit and New York has been used to bring the schools closer

to the people they serve—an admirable objective, even though there have been plenty of problems in practice. But school decentralization along traditional lines has not altered the preserve within the triangle I have described. It has merely provided increased access of citizens to two of the vertices of that triangle—those occupied by the school board and the school administrators. Not surprisingly, therefore, decentralization has awakened opposition in the teaching profession, which quite correctly sees in it a threat to the leverage of teachers' organizations.

The so-called "community school" has never caught on widely in the United States, although there have been some interesting experiments conducted in its name. No exact definition of this concept is possible, but it reaches closer to what I am advocating than does the school decentralization movement of recent years. The community school implies a wider role for the school in the services it provides for children than the traditional emphasis on book learning with all else left to others.

Other efforts to rethink and reorganize the nature and the role of schools are typified by the Parkway School experiment and the subsequent development of a variety of alternative school programs in Philadelphia. Parkway recognized that important learning could take place outside the school, that many of the tasks conducted by the school could be performed elsewhere, and that such changes could contribute to the success and the motivation of youth. The Parkway School made major use of the business community as a source for teaching and learning as does the High School of the City in New York and the Metro School in Chicago. But as valuable as such enterprises are in testing new definitions of education, they are not particularly useful in opening the way to new assumptions about who runs the schools. They are in effect given special licenses by the existing triangular structure to operate in nontraditional ways, and because of that structure not many such licenses are likely to be issued.

Individual School Councils

Last January, I was in Israel discussing some of the interesting research and experimentation there on the problem of how to make the schools more successful with disadvantaged children. In Israel, such children constitute about 50 percent of school enrollment, facing the education system with a pressing and monumental task of somehow adapting itself to meet problems like those faced by our central city schools in the United States.

In a conversation with Ozer Schild, Dean of the School of Education at the University of Haifa and formerly the Ministry of Education's director of research, I asked him the following question: "If one were to summarize all that has been learned by research and experimentation about the education of disadvantaged children both in Israel and the United States, what two or three significant lessons for change in the schools would emerge?" Dr. Schild, who has worked extensively in this country as well as in Israel, replied that in his judgment research had produced minimal guidance for schools working with disadvantaged children. The best hope, he said, lay in developing local school councils made up of a cross section of persons from a community, who would be given the power to develop their own responses to the needs of young people. He is now using his School of Education as a center to help some of these community councils to start thinking about working together. The members of such groups are teachers, school administrators, politicians, businessmen and others.

Some early starts toward individual school councils have begun here in the United States. In Florida, for example, laws changing the financial and governance systems of the public schools included the creation of school advisory councils. These councils, made up of citizens, are required to meet regularly with the school staff—administrators and teachers—and also to review an annual state of the school report as prepared by the school staff. More recently, the publicly-elected state commissioner of educa-

tion in California. Wilson Riles, has advocated individual school councils in that state as well.

Another indication of moves in this direction is the growing attention to something called "school site management." Thinking along this line stems from three premises: accountability, citizen participation, and a desire for flexibility at the local school level. I would like to see the idea expanded to take into account and deal with the other non-school educating forces that impinge on and affect learning for youngsters in local schools.

How could a local school council be developed for an elementary school or a junior high school in the United States? Who might serve on it, what might its prerogatives be? How might it differ from our traditional forms of citizen participation in the school boards and in parents' groups?

I have no firm plan in answer to these questions. Yet I do sense a gap in our arrangements for making our schools work better. The gap appears as soon as one recognizes that only part of a child's education takes place in the school and becomes more visible in the light of the prevailing three-cornered system of school control, with its tendency to focus entirely within the school and to build few alliances outside it.

With the reservation that it is not *the* model but possibly a model let's consider a school council for a junior high school in a city. The teachers must be represented and so must the school administration. I am less sure about the school board, but if there is a decentralized board maybe one of its members should serve. After this we begin to add the important parties who are fenced out of the conversation now—the police who are sometimes regarded as the enemy rather than as a cooperating social service, the nearby hospital or clinic that serves children and their families, the newspaper distribution agency that employs youngsters from the school, the recreation department of the city (probably through a supervisor of nearby playgrounds), a member of a neighborhood council or political club or church, and a couple of

parents. And let's not forget the need to include a student or two. It might be wise to stipulate in the beginning that the chairman of the council would come from the community rather than from teachers, school administration, or school board.

Many of these persons have never met each other, let alone sat down together to consider the needs of youth in and out of school and what to do about them. Some will have private agendas they want to push; some will be suspicious of others, if not downright antagonistic toward them, and most will wonder whether this new outfit isn't a waste of time that interferes with their favorite television shows.

The powers to be delegated to such a group are a potential source of contention within the old triangle of school control. It should not be responsible for professional appointments and salaries within the school, but it should control some of the following:

—Compensatory education funds available to the school to improve the opportunities of disadvantaged youngsters.

—Appointment of special persons to serve in the school in order to bring to students the services of other community agencies.

—A significant consultative role in the appointment of the school principal.

—Planning for activities conducted outside the school for the benefit of its students.

Starting school councils with anything like these powers will challenge the vested interests of all the parties now exercising control of the school—school boards, administrators, and teachers. So getting started is likely to be a slow game. About the only way such a concept might move forward is with the help of a citizens' organization that incorporates within its membership a strong component of community leadership. One factor that will assist with making such a change is the deep concern that people are now developing about the problems of children and youth and about the apparent lack of success of schools in solving them.

There are already some efforts under way in

various places across the country to do this kind of thing. Some cities have set up special programs to work on the problems of youth employment by bringing together high schools, employers, and other social agencies. I understand that in Indianapolis and Atlanta there are pilot programs to serve young people more comprehensively through the schools, although they do not include the shifts in governance suggested here.

It is important to underline two points in closing. The first is that I am talking about changes that focus upon the individual school, not the school system. I believe that we have to go back to that fundamental unit in order to bring the changes we need and enlist the parties needed to make those changes. Secondly, what I have suggested here cuts across all sorts of legalistic and bureaucratic lines. Whether we can adjust these in the interests of the next generation of young Americans may well influence not only the lives they will live but also the kind of country they will live in.

RELATED FORD FOUNDATION ACTIVITIES

The Ford Foundation has supported a number of programs aimed at bringing schools closer to the people they serve and fostering educational partnerships among students, parents, school officials, and community groups.

One area where citizen involvement has been an important factor is in the Foundation's programs to maintain educational values where court-ordered public school desegregation has occurred. For example, support has gone to the National Conference of Christians and Jews for conferences, workshops, and technical assistance to help neighborhood social and religious groups prepare for changes in school attendance patterns, and to the L.Q.C. Lamar Society to work with key business, labor, political, religious, and intellectual leaders in such cities as Memphis, Dallas, Omaha, and Dayton, where school desegregation is planned or in progress. In Boston two groups have received grants to involve parents and citizen groups in school activities—School Volunteers of Boston to recruit volunteers from universities, business, and cultural organizations to work as tutors or teacher assistants in twenty-four special "magnet" schools throughout the city, and City-Wide Educational Coalition to organize and train multiethnic parents councils to participate in local school policy-making.

A number of other grants have been made to communities for experiments in administrative decentralization of the schools as a means of increasing local participation in educational policy decisions. Some years ago the Foundation awarded planning grants to a few New York City community school districts formed under Board of Education auspices. After state-mandated decentralization the Foundation made several grants to assist the transition from purely advisory local boards to elected community boards empowered to hire their own superintendents and to make certain budgetary, personnel, and other policy decisions. Later, the New York City Board of Education received

some $300,000 to provide management training to the newly-formed community school boards on such matters as school finance, instructional improvement, and staff development. Grants also were made in Detroit, where school officials attempted to improve citizen participation in various aspects of the schools.

Over the last seven years the Foundation has sponsored a wide range of activities dealing with reforming school finance.* Among these grants have been projects to improve community understanding of the complex issues involved in school funding. In 1973 the League of Women Voters received funds to mount a large-scale program of publications, workshops, films, and speakers to educate citizens about the inequities of existing funding systems and the implications of proposed tax reforms. In 1975 the District of Columbia Citizens for Better Public Education received a grant to study how school funds are allocated in the District of Columbia. To ensure that minority groups are included in the process of school financial reform, the National Urban Coalition has received almost $1 million since 1971 to provide technical and financial assistance to groups representing urban minority interests in Michigan, California, Texas, New Jersey, South Carolina, Ohio, and Colorado.

The Foundation has supported both national and local projects to involve citizens in reform that would help restore their general confidence in public school systems and serve the needs of all students. To this end, almost $1 million has been granted to the National Committee for Citizens in Education for training, research, dissemination of information, and other activities to promote citizen participation on such issues as school bus safety, school governance, invasion of privacy and denial of access to pupil records. The committee's work was used by Congress in preparing an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1974 according parents the right to inspect student records.

Recently funds were also given to the Citizens Committee for the Children of New York City on behalf of the Educational Priorities Panel. The panel, representing a broad coalition of some eighteen parent, educational, and civic groups, performs in-depth analyses of New York City school budgets, makes recommendations for improving fiscal management, and opens up channels for the community to have an impact on setting budgetary priorities. In Detroit, a coalition of civic groups called New Detroit, Inc. also received Foundation support to help the special Educational Task Force of the Detroit Board of Education solve the instructional, personnel, management, and financial problems of the city's schools.

*See Paying for Schools and Colleges, Ford Foundation report